



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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The Honorable Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Governor Brown,

This COVID-19 pandemic has brought financial uncertainty to hardworking Oregonians across the state. I continue to hear from far too many Oregonians in desperate need of help. To assist those facing unemployment, President Trump recently signed an executive order providing additional money for unemployed individuals. I urge you to ensure that the Oregon Employment Department (OED) immediately provide these much needed dollars to Oregonians, just like states such as New Mexico, Colorado, and Idaho have done.

My casework staff has been busy trying to help unemployed individuals in whatever way they can. My office has received hundreds of calls asking for help in getting their unemployment claims. We recently heard from an elderly constituent who was working to supplement Social Security until they were laid off as a result of COVID-19. This constituent, who had never collected unemployment before, applied in April but has yet to receive those benefits. Another constituent has been waiting at least 11 weeks to receive unemployment, calling OED every day. They have yet to reach anyone at OED who can speak with them. The one time this constituent managed to get through, they were put on hold for over an hour before the call was dropped.

In March, Congress acted to expand unemployment assistance to Americans under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. Unfortunately, it took until August to pay a fraction of the PUA claims that OED received.¹ The delays caused by OED's failure to modernize the state's unemployment system has made an already tragic situation in Oregon worse. Oregon received \$85.6 million in federal funding under the federal Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act of 2009. As of October 2019, almost the entirety of the funds, \$81.7 million, remained unspent. This delay is troubling and projections that upgrades will not be complete until 2025 is unacceptable. I ask that you expedite this modernization project to ensure working infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of Oregonians.

The \$600 weekly supplement included in the PUA expired July 31, 2020. Congress is still negotiating a new coronavirus package but, in the meantime, President Trump signed an

¹ <https://www.opb.org/article/2020/08/05/months-later-still-waiting-for-unemployment-benefits-in-oregon/#:~:text=The%20Oregon%20Employment%20Department%20says,These%20people%20are%20still%20waiting.>

executive order implementing the Lost Wages Assistance program, allowing an additional \$400 a week be paid to those receiving unemployment, mostly from federal funds from FEMA.²

As of yet, Interim Director Gerstenfeld has stated that he is unsure whether Oregon will take advantage of this program because of the “uncertainty” involved in implementation.³ These payments are administered and delivered by the state in conjunction with Oregon’s unemployment insurance system. Oregon has mostly administered the \$600 federal benefit from the CARES Act, it should stand to reason the state would be able to handle administration of the \$300 benefit regardless of where it comes from. These funds are available for the benefit of the thousands of Oregonians who have filed for unemployment. I urge you to take advantage of these funds and apply for their usage. A \$300 weekly benefit is still of more use than a one-time payout of \$500.

We share the same goal of wanting to help Oregonians find some financial certainty where there has been none. Arizona’s citizens are already receiving this benefit⁴, why should Oregonians be denied the chance to get it? Louisiana expects to begin paying this additional benefit the week of August 24th⁵, and Idaho’s application has been approved and will shortly begin to pay out these benefits.⁶ I urge you to take advantage of the President’s executive order and provide Oregonians with the additional federal unemployment benefits they deserve.

Sincerely,



Greg Warden
Oregon’s 2nd District
U.S. Representative

² <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/fema-lost-wages-supplemental-payment-assistance>

³ <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2020/08/oregon-says-uncertainty-precludes-paying-trumps-400-unemployment-bonus-at-least-for-now.html>

⁴ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/arizona-residents-are-among-first-americans-to-receive-300-extra-in-unemployment-benefits-ordered-by-trump-2020-08-18>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertberger/2020/08/16/extra-300-weekly-unemployment-benefit-to-go-out-this-week-for-some/#7f50c7524ab4>

⁶ <https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/when-extra-300-unemployment-washington-idaho/293-7e97339f-be3c-4089-b76b-bdde3693dd81>